

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 007500

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [KPAL](#) [JO](#)

SUBJECT: EAST BANK NATIONALISTS WANT "DEMOCRACY," BUT ON THEIR TERMS

REF: A. AMMAN 7498

[B.](#) AMMAN 6898

Classified By: CDA Daniel Rubinstein for Reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: East Bankers sometimes complain to us that "their country" is being taken over by "minority groups" (i.e., Jordanians of Palestinian origin). While some East Bank nationalists claim they support greater democratization, what they seem to really want is political freedom for "true Jordanians" only. Their stiff resistance to greater political participation by West Bankers will likely translate into an icy reception for the upcoming National Agenda for reform if it provides for any expansion of Palestinian-Jordanian political representation. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) Poloffs met September 11 with 15 self-described "nationalists," all East Bankers, at their request to discuss the current political situation in Jordan. The group included three former members of parliament, sheikhs from the Bani Sakher, Al-Hajaya and Sahab tribes, a retired army brigadier general, and two professors from Jordanian universities. Dr. Ahmad Al-Abbad, one of the former MPs and a published historian with a degree from Cambridge University, served as the primary spokesman for the group.

¶3. (C) Abbadi and his East Bank colleagues stressed that they were "brothers" with the Palestinian people, and sought good relations with "other groups" in Jordan. Nevertheless, they complained - at times bitterly - that "real Jordanians" were increasingly being excluded from positions of political power, and that GOJ policies favored what they called "minorities," meaning Palestinian-Jordanians. (In fact, East Bankers are now the minority in Jordan.) From their perspective, the current cabinet was dominated by members of "minority groups." At one point, several claimed that only 6 of the 28 cabinet ministers were of "pure" Jordanian ancestry, though they backed down when asked to explain this claim. (NOTE: Post calculates that only 6 members of the cabinet were born west of the Jordan River or are descended from West Bankers. A few other ministers can trace their distant roots to areas outside of modern-day Jordan; consequently some hard-liners don't consider them as "true" Jordanians even when their families have been here for a century or more. END NOTE.) The group had particularly harsh words for Deputy Prime Minister Marwan Muasher, saying that he was "despised" by "real Jordanians." (Muasher is the scion of a Christian family that has been on the East Bank since the time of the Muslim conquest. We suspect their beef with Muasher has less to do with his origins or faith than with his reputation as a defender of Palestinian rights on both banks of the Jordan.)

¶4. (C) When poloff pointed out that a large majority in parliament was of East Bank origin, the group replied that most of them were "corrupt" and had sold out their countrymen. "Everyone knows the current parliament does not represent or care about the true Jordanian people," Abbadi said. Citing a recent survey by the Center for Strategic Studies that 77% of Jordanians fear punishment or retribution for public criticism of the government (down from 83.2% in 2004), he claimed that many East Bankers shared his disdain for the GOJ, but were afraid to voice their opinions. "If people were allowed to say what they feel, you would understand how deep opposition to the government by true Jordanians runs," Abbadi said. Similarly, retired Brigadier General Ali Abdul Jawwad Al-Tahrawi alleged that a high level of animosity exists throughout the military (whose members and leaders are overwhelmingly East Bankers) toward the government. (Comment: Post has seen only sporadic evidence of this. End Comment.)

¶5. (C) Along with greater freedom of expression, Abbadi and his group called for "democratic reform" to help resolve their grievances against the government. In this context, they said that the Prime Minister should be chosen by the parliament or directly elected by "true Jordanians," rather than appointed by the King. While Abbadi claimed allegiance to the King, he nevertheless referred to King Abdullah I (Jordan's first monarch) as "an invader," and remarked that the Hashemite "social compact" with the Jordanian people had been broken. In this group's opinion, King Abdullah should devolve most of his powers and limit his role in government to that of a European monarch. (NOTE: As for Queen Rania,

Abbadri and others were almost savage in their comments against her. END NOTE.) The authority of parliament should be expanded, the group continued, with an end to all quotas and "interference by the government and the intelligence service" in electoral campaigns. These measures, if implemented, would help "true Jordanians" to reclaim their country from the control of "outsiders." If no such reforms were made, Abbadri predicted that "major problems" and social unrest would lay ahead, along with a possible rise in extremist violence as East Bankers sought an outlet for their anger against the government and the monarchy.

¶6. (C) COMMENT: While Abbadri and his colleagues are not fully representative of the broader East Bank community, neither are their grievances very unusual. Resentment against the government among non-elite East Bankers, who see themselves as losing ground both economically and politically to West Bankers, may be very real and is likely growing, though it does not pose a significant threat to regime stability in the short term. The intent of these die-hard nationalists' calls for reform is clear -- full political and voting rights (and thus political power) should be limited to "true" Jordanians (i.e., not those of Palestinian origin). Consequently, if the royal commission for the National Agenda releases, as expected (refs A, B), recommendations in the coming month that expand political participation and representation for Palestinian-Jordanians, it will likely meet an icy, if not hostile, reception by many East Bank Jordanians. END COMMENT.

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